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SUBJECT: TURKEY/ISRAEL/PALESTINE: TURKEY RECOMMENDS WAIT
AND SEE ON HAMAS

REF: ANKARA 0264

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANICE G. WEINER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary. The GOT prefers to look hopefully at Hamas's victory in Palestinian elections; the next task is to help Hamas transform, according to the Foreign Ministry. The GOT believes Hamas is well aware of the Palestinian people's dependence on its relationship with Israel and economic support from the U.S., Europe and others. The Palestinians voted for change and against Fatah, not against the peace process, according to MFA thinking. Should Hamas choose to be a negotiating partner, the GOT expects it will be more effective than Fatah. Turkey will continue its reconstruction projects in the Palestinian Territories and believes Hamas, and Israel, need time to sort out their respective political courses. Mainstream Turkish press commentary has been wary of the Hamas victory while the Islamist press is arguing for engagement with Hamas as the only entity that can stop terrorism. End Summary.

12. (C) MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal shared with us current GOT thinking on the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections on January 30. He said Prime Minister Erdogan articulated Turkey's views in his statements at Davos: the elections were democratic and the Palestinians should be congratulated; the election results must be respected; and Hamas must be given time to reveal its stance once in the government. According to Onal, Erdogan made clear that Hamas must recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce terrorism, but also said the world should not approach Hamas with preconceptions. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Gul has said that the democratic process should be respected and expressed his hopes that the Middle East Peace Process would continue.

13. (C) Onal said the GOT is looking at the Hamas victory and its aftermath in a practical manner. Hamas's victory was first and foremost a vote for change and a rejection of Fatah's incompetence and corruption, not an endorsement of Hamas's ideology. Hamas is a reality now with which we must deal, and, if possible, help it transform itself. This does not mean that we must accept Hamas's record of terrorism and its calls for Israel's destruction. With Israeli elections in March, we cannot expect too much flexibility or a reduction in rhetoric from Israel; the politics of both sides will need several months to settle. At the same time, Hamas cannot ignore the fact that the Palestinian territories are economically dependent on their relationship with Israel and on aid from the U.S., Europe and others. Loss of this support would hurt the Palestinian people. The GOT believes Hamas is keenly aware of the delicate situation in which it now finds itself.

14. (C) Preferring to look at the glass as half full, the GOT is inclined to see Hamas's participation in the elections as a sign it has tacitly come to accept the Oslo accords, something which it was not prepared to do ten years ago when it boycotted elections. Onal also brought up the fact that the Palestinian Liberation Organization formerly espoused terrorism as well, but then chose a more moderate course. Finally, the GOT sees Fatah as having been weakened to the point of ineffectiveness as the Palestinian negotiating partner. The MFA views Hamas as having the power and mandate to negotiate effectively, if it chooses to do so.

15. (C) The conclusion the GOT has drawn is that Hamas must be given time to demonstrate its intentions once in power. Onal said that Turkey has taken no decision to re-evaluate its development projects in support of the Palestinian people, including its agreement to revive and manage the Erez Industrial Zone, signed separately with Israel and the Palestinian Authority on January 5 (reftel).

16. (C) Comment. Onal took pains to explain that Turkey is determined to "institutionalize" its relationship with Israel and thereby insulate it from changing political currents and administrations in Turkey. While public sensitivity to the plight of fellow Muslims sometimes constrains Turkey's room for maneuver, Onal insisted that Turkey is setting the

relationship on solid footing, citing Erez,
military-to-military cooperation, and political cooperation
such as Ankara's facilitation of a meeting of Israeli and
Pakistani Foreign Ministers in Istanbul last year as concrete
examples of Turkey's commitment. End comment.
WILSON